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SUBJECT: SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS: SIDE FORUMS AND PEOPLE'S SUMMIT

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Private Sector Forum and the Youth Forum of the Summit of the Americas (SOA) will take place April 15-16 on the cruise ship Caribbean Princess, and the Civil Society Forum will be held the same days on the Carnival Victory. Both ships, to be docked near the SOA site at the Hyatt Hotel, will then house official delegates to the April 17-19 Summit of the Americas. In addition to the three official pre-SOA meetings, the fourth People's Summit of the Americas will take place April 16-18 at the Cipriani College of Labor in Valsayn, ten miles from Port of Spain. The People's Summit will convene farmers, indigenous peoples, labor unions, environmental and human rights organizations and others to protest neo-liberal economic models, militarism, and free trade. Members of the People's Summit plan to demonstrate in Port of Spain during the SOA, though the government has said that it will not give a permit for crowds near Summit sites. The preparatory state of the side forums, and the alternate event, about mirrors the current situation on the Summit itself -- behind but pulling out all stops to catch up. END SUMMARY.

CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM: SECRETARIAT SAYS ALL ON TRACK  
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12. (SBU) Summit Secretariat Advisor Maxine Harris told Poloff February 16 that preparations for the Civil Society Forum were on track. She expected about 250 persons from outside TT and 100-150 local participants. Participants would include non-governmental organizations (NGO), human rights groups, community-based organizations, academics and the disabled. The GOTT would provide transportation from the airport to the ship. Harris expected the focus to be on capacity building and information exchange. In addition to the meetings on the ship, there would be a "People's Space" on Brian Lara promenade, just outside the secure zone surrounding the Hyatt in downtown Port of Spain, where participants could walk around and interact informally.

NEED TO PROMOTE SOA AWARENESS  
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13. (SBU) In a separate February 11 meeting with well-known activist Hazel Brown, Director of the "Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women," and Gia-Gaspard Taylor, who works in the Port of Spain Mayor's office, PolOffs were told the Civil Society Forum hopes to have 200 local delegates and 250 from other countries. Brown plans to organize a Caribbean-wide video conference prior to the Summit to promote SOA awareness and discuss regional concerns. In addition, her group is working to promote greater SOA awareness within Trinidad and Tobago by organizing a Carnival Band and visiting schools to organize mock debates on Summit topics. Ms. Brown echoed media comments that the Summit Secretariat had not yet made the SOA seem relevant to most of the people of TT. She also hoped that Foreign Ministers in country on April 17 would meet with the Civil Society Forum. She added that citizens of TT were looking forward

to at least catching a glimpse of President Obama; seeing him would be the most tangible benefit of the Summit for many. (Note: Ms. Brown has also asked that the First Lady, should she travel to Port of Spain, speak at a Work and Family Symposium she would organize.)

#### SOME CONCERNS

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14. (SBU) Brown said the Summit Secretariat had "arbitrarily" chosen GOTT Deputy National Summit Coordinator Beverly Khan to chair the Civil Society Forum without input from NGOs, and that the Secretariat had marginalized the Foreign Ministry and various UN agencies. In addition, she said, there had been more turnover in the Secretariat staff than had been publicly reported, and the mid-level staffers were generally uninformed and were neither helpful nor qualified. The Secretariat, while micromanaging the SOA process, was in turn being micromanaged by the Prime Minister. Finally, she said the Secretariat had not budgeted to fund the Civil Society Forum, which was pretty much left on its own. She had no information at the time of our meeting earlier this month, for example, on ship room rates or registration.

#### YOUTH FORUM

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15. (SBU) Poloff met February 16 with Summit Support Specialist Christalle Gammon, who is coordinating the Youth Forum, to be held April 15-16 on the cruise ship Caribbean Princess. This forum, really for young entrepreneurs, will concentrate on the promotion and creation of opportunities for young people through the use of technology, media and electronic networking and also include a discussion on SOA themes. The Youth Forum expects to host 100

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Trinidadians, 75 from the CARICOM region, and 75 from the rest of the hemisphere. Prior to the Youth Forum, a "Trinbago Experience" conference is set for April 13-14 on creativity and innovation, with a focus on the science and business of Carnival, as well as segments on science and biotechnology, energy and the environment, media, and design. Organizers expect about 250 Trinidadians and 50 from the CARICOM region to be participating.

#### PRIVATE SECTOR FORUM

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16. (SBU) Richard Ramsawak, the Summit Support Specialist coordinating the Private Sector Forum, told Poloff February 16 that the Private Sector Forum would discuss the competitive agenda for the hemisphere in the light of the current economic downturn. It would also seek to identify areas for private and public sector partnership, and provide opportunities for business networking. The meetings would further concentrate on service and manufacturing industries, with a focus on sectors likely to be influenced by the U.S. stimulus package, including health care and alternative energy. At CARICOM's request, there would also be an emphasis on creating and maintaining small and medium enterprises (SME). About 350 participants from outside of Trinidad (many from neighboring countries) and about 70 local participants are expected to attend. Business contacts have repeatedly told us, including in a conversation on February 18, that this forum is behind schedule, with the government "sketchy" on details. Our contacts add, though, that the GOTT has indicated to local business groups that it will spend whatever is necessary to make the event a success.

#### PEOPLE'S SUMMIT

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17. (SBU) The fourth People's Summit will be held April 16-18 at Cipriani Labor College in Valsayn. This alternative summit is being organized by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FITUN) and NGOs, in conjunction with the Assembly of Caribbean People (ACP), the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA), and the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas. According to organizers, the gathering will oppose "neo-liberalism" and promote social justice, equity, peace and sustainable development, while addressing the

crises of debt, food, energy, water, and environmental degradation. GOTT National Summit official Maxine Harris, who is in contact with People's Summit organizers, including local labor leader David Abdulah, told us that some who attend the Civil Society Forum might then participate in the People's Summit. Abdulah, she continued, was told he could hold the forum and even march if he wishes, as long as he and his group stayed out of Port of Spain. Robert Giuseppe, another local labor leader, announced at a February 16 press conference that some 50 foreign trade union delegates also would seek a "dialogue" with foreign ministers.

18. (SBU) Poloffs met February 19 with David Abdulah, an Oilfields Workers' Trade Union leader and a key organizer of the People's Summit. Abdulah said the alternate summit agenda would mirror SOA topics and include energy, agriculture and the global financial crisis. He said there would be a march in Port of Spain and that he was "working with the authorities" on the exact route. He intended to come as close to the SOA site as possible and hinted at looking at other venues to demonstrate (he asked, for instance, where the President would be staying, and we deflected the question). Abdulah emphasized that demonstrations in Trinidad were traditionally flamboyant but non-confrontational and non-violent, and he expected no incidents. Abdulah added that representatives from Cuba would attend the People's Summit, but he still did not know whether any high profile "celebrities" would participate. Logistics, such as lodging for the delegates, contracting interpreters, and arranging for transport, were still at a rudimentary stage, he said.

COMMENT: RUNNING TO CATCH UP

19. (SBU) The preparatory state of the side forums about mirrors the current situation on the Summit itself -- behind but pulling out all stops to catch up. Whether there is enough time remains an open question; in the inevitable triage of resources leading up to mid-April, it is more likely the side events than the main show will suffer. As for the People's Summit, that remains a wild card. Labor is strong in Trinidad and some of the current downturn in the oil and gas industry may play into discontent expressed at the alternate event. Large demonstrations (as opposed to parties) are rare in T&T, but the Summit itself is an unprecedented event. The GOTT has told us it will not allow demonstrators near the Summit sites, going so far as to flatly say "they will not get permits." We will continue to follow this matter closely, both with People's Summit organizers and the GOTT.

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